

Scrapbook
content
10/10/12

10/10/12

Appleby Archaeology Group

On Tuesday April 2nd the Appleby Archaeology Group enjoyed a very informative talk from Andrew Lowe, Building and Conservation Officer from the Lake District National Park. The title of the talk was Discovering a Landscape of Industry.

He began his well illustrated talk with a slide of post card images of the Lake District. These popular images however do not convey the rich industrial heritage of the area. Industry has been present from prehistoric times but Mr Lowe concentrated on industry since the Elizabethan age. He emphasised that it was the landscape that provided the raw materials and it was the use of those that influenced the landscape. Three elements were highlighted; the rocks, the woodlands and water. 200 years ago it would have been a busier landscape than today with men mining slate, copper and lead from the rocks, bark peelers and charcoal burners working in the woods with the water providing power and a means of transport.

Mr Lowe described slate quarrying in some detail, mentioning the skills of splitting and dressing the slate. There was an expansion in production at the time of the industrial revolution when slates were required for roofing the expanding towns of the north. The evidence of this industry is clear to see in walls and buildings and in the spoil heaps and sled tracks at the worked sites. Minerals, such as lead and copper were mined. The 16th century saw a development in mining as the Elizabethans searched for gold, silver and copper ores. The main mining centre was Newlands Valley near Keswick. Miners were brought from Germany, as at that time their techniques were the more advanced. Mines were soon opened in other areas. Copper ores were mined at Coppermines Valley near Coniston over a long period. The great working period there was the 1830s and 40s when up to 600 men were employed and 13 waterwheels were in use. Today, 19th century remains of tramways, wheel houses and buildings can be seen.. The adits, horizontal tunnels, and shafts that can be seen in the rocky landscape are evidence of mining.

Iron ore in the form of haematite has been mined for centuries. Charcoal was required to smelt that ore. Until the 18th century iron was smelted in "bloomeries" but in 1736 the Duddon Iron Furnace began production using charcoal, from the local woods, and bellows powered by water from the river. Backbarrow Furnace on the river Leven in Furness was the longest functioning

blast furnace working from 1711-1916. Debris from smelting can be seen on the ground, the nature of the debris indicating the process used. There are remains of the building themselves and a good example is the reconstructed Duddon Iron Furnace which was one of the first industrial buildings to be scheduled in the 1960s.

The woodland industries included coppicing for charcoal, bark peeling for tanning, bobbin making and the weaving of thin oak lathes to make the "spelk" or "swill" basket. Charcoal was the principal smelting agent for metallurgic industries and an important ingredient of gunpowder. The gunpowder industry was established in the 18th century in the south of the Lake District where charcoal and water power were available. Evidence of these industries abounds in the woodlands from the signs of coppicing, track ways, remains of the charcoal burners huts, and burning platforms up to 25 feet in diameter. The woodlands were managed to provide the resources and that is why so many survive in the south of the county.

Waterpower was required for mining and for some of the woodland industries. Water mills are often found close together to make use of the available power a good example is Stavely. Nearby Backbarrow has one of the oldest rows of terraced houses in the Lakes, dating from the 1780s, built to house the mill workers. The "blue" used in laundering was made at Blue Mill, Backbarrow. The lakes were an economic lifeline and until the coming of the railways, were with packhorses the main means of transport. Improvements were made to the roads with the introduction of turnpikes and mile posts. In 1847 the railway reached Windermere and in 1859 Coniston. The railways provided a transport system for industry but before long the owners saw the opportunity to develop tourism.

Mr Lowe concluded by suggesting that a study of place names such as Papermill Coppice, Spindle Coppice, Spark Bridge and Great Ore Gate provide a clue to the industrial heritage of the Lake District.

The next meeting of the group will be on Tuesday May 14th at 7pm in the Intake Centre Appleby Grammar School, when Adrian Waite of the Red Wyvern Society will talk on Living History and Archaeology.

PH R April 6, 2002